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'It's a Grand Thing to Get Leave to Live': The Educational Legacy of Nan Shepherd

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ABSTRACT

This article offers some insights into the early life and educational experiences of the writer and educationalist Anna (Nan) Shepherd (1893-1981), with a view to exploring her legacy for contemporary educators and academics – and indeed for all those who have a stake in education. Nan Shepherd's example suggests that it is only by contemplating what surrounds us with due care and attention rather than ruthlessly exploiting our natural resources that we may live our lives 'with a great but quiet gusto' (Macfarlane, 2011, p. xi). Her example stands as a necessary corrective to the contemporary emphasis on 'excellence' and 'impact' and utilitarian views of both education and research. These are increasingly seen as means for securing prestige for individuals and institutions and broader competitive advantage in a climate where economic gain is regarded as an unquestioned good. Shepherd's legacy underlines the broader civic purposes of education, for example the creation of a more just and fulfilling society and the conduct of more meaningful lives, lived fully and in respectful relation to others. These dimensions are explored through Shepherd's relationship with others, including her friend and contemporary John Macmurray, the novelist Neil Gunn and the teachers who influenced her during her time at school and at university.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to offer some insights into the early life and educational experiences of the writer and educationalist Anna (Nan) Shepherd (1893-1981). The overarching aim is to explore her legacy for contemporary educators and academics – and indeed all those who have a stake in education. I hope to do so in a manner that foregrounds the love, encouragement, humour and passion that are necessary for us to carry on lightly and blithely in challenging circumstances. This is infinitely more important than simply carrying on regardless when the going gets rough. Nan's example suggests that it is precisely by contemplating what surrounds us with care and attention that we may live our lives 'with a great but quiet gusto' (Macfarlane, 2011, p. xi). This is certainly how Nan

Shepherd chose to live hers. I believe that her example might just enable us to do the same.

Nan Shepherd was for many years a teacher-educator in the north east of Scotland, although her reputation rests primarily on her literary achievements.³ Part of my aim in this article is to suggest that her way of being in the world is a necessary corrective to the various forms of self-aggrandisement that have become the norm in educational discourse in recent years. Although they are evident at all stages in education, their disfiguring effects are perhaps particularly evident in higher education. It is to these that we shall now briefly turn our attention. This is a necessary precursor to examining more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in relation to education and research.

HOW THE LAND LIES

As many commentators have pointed out, higher education appears increasingly to be in the service of industry, commerce and government. As a result, there is less emphasis on its broader civic purpose, for example the creation of a more just and fulfilling society, and the conduct of more meaningful lives, lived fully and in respectful relation to others (Collini, 2012; 2017). Conroy and Smith (2017, p. 704) attribute the irresistible rise of 'bigging up' in the university and the settled disposition towards boasting, bragging and relentless self-promotion among some academics to the fact that the 'prioritising of impact casts as marginal the researcher who is modest or diffident'. For readers unfamiliar with the UK context, the term 'impact' refers to the 'vague and general idea that university research should hold [tangible] benefits for the wider non-academic community' (Conroy and Smith, 2017, p. 707).⁴ The word 'impact' has unfortunate overtones of the manner in which the term is used in physics, to refer to what happens during the collision of an irresistible force with an immovable object. In the field of education, an area of inquiry that is infused by the humanities and social sciences, it is not straightforward to demonstrate impact in the terms suggested by the UK higher education funding bodies. The basic premise is that research must achieve *demonstrable* benefits to the wider economy and society. These relate to diverse phenomena such as improved health outcomes; the development of new products, services or medical interventions; or the creation of new businesses. As Collini (2012, p. 169) points out, the guidelines 'make it clear that "impact" does *not* include "intellectual influence" on the work of other scholars and does *not* include influence on the "content" of teaching.' The notion of impact appears to have been developed with

³ Nan Shepherd's three novels were published in an intensely creative period between 1928 and 1933. Her only collection of poetry followed a year later. Her first novel *The Quarry Wood* (1928) is a *Bildungsroman* that draws extensively on the author's own life experience in the rural northeast of Scotland. *The Weatherhouse* displays an extensive cast of mainly female characters live their lives in the wake of World War One, experiencing the heart of life in the challenging social and political climate of the inter-war years. She is best known for *The Living Mountain* her only work of non-fiction, which draws upon her lifetime of experience in the Cairngorms and the importance of living in and through the senses.

⁴ As Conroy and Smith (2017, p. 703) explain, 'the implicit model seems to be that of working with an industrial partner to produce a light-sabre, or to discover and exploit a new lubricant for hip joints.'

scientific, medical and technological disciplines in mind, with insufficient consideration of the disastrous impact (in the everyday sense of the term) on the humanities of a one-size-fits-all approach to impact. It is admittedly *risqué* analogy, but the cultural and social impact of ‘impact’ might be compared to the environmental impact of fracking: it consumes large amounts of natural resources and contaminates the groundwater around the site. The wholesale investment in the notion of ‘impact’ by policy makers and senior university management, and the co-option of academics into associated forms of gamesmanship, only serves to distract us from investing in renewable sources of energy, as it were. It is unlikely to provide us with the conceptual resources that will enable us to safeguard the precious resource of the university as a civic institution for future generations.

The net result of these nefarious developments is that there is a very real risk that ‘evidence of strong impact’ may in some instances be reduced to a ‘self-evident affirmation of the quality of underpinning research’ (Conroy and Smith, 2017, p. 703). It is clear that this impoverishes all concerned, at least if we take into account the moral substratum that underlies reputational gain. However, it may have an even more invidious long-term effect, in so far as it has the potential to compromise the long-term viability of the sector, by undermining the credibility of all those who undertake research. This can only lead to increased public scepticism and to renewed cries of ‘lies, damn lies and statistics’ from the broader public. I need hardly point out that this only further undermines the role of the university as a civic institution and custodian of the democratic intellect in the popular imagination in Scotland.

Unfortunately, one need not look too far for precedents for ‘bigging up’ in Scottish education. For example, Andrew Davis (2012) has explored how the exaggerated claims made in relation to the impact of synthetic phonics on children’s literacy development have had a major and long-lasting ‘impact’. The small-scale studies of synthetic phonics conducted in Scotland in the 1990s during the Early Intervention Programme for enhanced literacy development in the early years achieved high impact status. They subsequently became powerful drivers of education policy across the UK, despite doubts as to their efficacy. In the intervening decades, it seems that ‘bigging up’ has become a fact of life. It is surely time to reach for a powerful antidote. Striding across the Cairngorm plateau, that ‘mass of granite thrust up through the schists and gneiss that form the lower surrounding hills’ (Shepherd, 2011, p. 1) Nan Shepherd sets care for each other and care for our environment at the heart of her endeavours.

THE VIEW FROM THE PLATEAU

In marked contrast to some of the examples considered above, Nan Shepherd was one of those people ‘who tries to stand right with regard to truth-telling [by leaning] a little to the side of irony’ rather than to the side of ‘bigging up’ (Conroy and Smith, 2017, p. 705). Nan stands as a beacon (if that is not an oxymoron) for ‘those whose research and scholarship is *reflective, patient, serendipitous, counter-cultural, diffident but unafraid*’ (Conroy and Smith, 2017, p. 706) (my emphasis). Shepherd’s

research⁵ could certainly be described as ‘blue skies’, as it was often conducted lying down with her back against warm, scented heather and staring up at the clear air of the Cairngorms. At that altitude ‘the shadows are sharp and intense’ and there is every shade of blue on offer, ‘from opalescent milky-white to indigo’ (Shepherd, 2011, p. 41). (‘What shade of blue skies research might meet with the VP’s approval?’ This is a mischievous question that we might ask in some untroubled parallel universe.) Nan Shepherd’s passion for the Cairngorm plateau meant that she was singularly well equipped to lean against the prevailing winds – literally as well as metaphorically. She is a lodestar for all those of independent mind and free spirit who would make a strong case for the ‘deeper and more enduring ethical purposes and values of the university’ (Conroy and Smith, 2017, 706); the reinvigoration of the ‘qualities of responsiveness [and] judgement’; and an end to ‘hustling and hawking’ (Collini, 2012, p. 172).

As her close friend and contemporary John Macmurray (1891-1976) observed over 80 years ago ‘we have immense power and immense resources; *we worship efficiency and success; and we do not know how to live finely*’ (Macmurray, 1935, p. 76) (my emphasis). Due to the mere fact that I have seen fit to repeat them here, these words resonate more deeply in our own times than when they were first published. Nan Shepherd certainly understood how to live, and it is mainly for this reason that I have chosen to honour her in the pages of the *Scottish Educational Review*. It appears that I am not alone in my admiration. Nan has achieved iconic status in recent years, despite having received notably less scholarly attention than her contemporary John Macmurray (see, for example, Fielding, 2007, 2012; Stern, 2001, 2012; MacAllister and Thorburn, 2014). She was recently commemorated as a ‘Scottish hero’ on a batch of polymer five-pound notes issued by the Royal Bank of Scotland in 2016. This was part of a series devised through public consultation to celebrate the people of Scotland.⁶ Shepherd was the first woman to feature on a main issue bank note. The five-pound note bears a striking photograph of her as a young woman, depicted against the background of her beloved Cairngorms. It bears the legend ‘*It’s a grand thing to get leave to live.*’ This quotation from her novel *The Quarry Wood* (1928) encapsulates Shepherd’s humility and enthusiasm. There is no sense of entitlement, no assumption of pre-eminence. That line from *The Quarry Wood* also provides some insight into her personal epistemology and to the primacy she accorded to living in the senses rather accumulating knowledge as an end in itself. It is, of course, ironic that Nan is celebrated on a token of the accumulation of capital, as this was an aspect of life that she evidently did not hold in high regard. She showed no interest in moving on from her modest regional life and remained rooted in the area in which she was born, in the village of Cults near Aberdeen. ‘I’ve had the same bedroom all my life’, she told an interviewer in the 1970s.⁷

Nan also brings a delightful sense of irony to bear on the shibboleth of excellence that has marred education discourse in Scotland in recent years. Having finally

⁵ In this context I take the term ‘research’ to mean ‘to search and to search again’ rather to engage in the type of activity that may ultimately result in the granting of a patent or better-lubricated hips.

⁶ <https://nilehq.com/work/a-design-of-note/>

⁷ Vivienne Forrest, ‘In search of Nan Shepherd’, *Leopard Magazine*, 1986, pp. 17-19.

achieved the important social goal of ‘marrying well’, Aunt Craigmyle, the matriarchal protagonist of Shepherd’s second novel *The Weatherhouse* (1930) is left ‘widowed and unperturbed’ at a relatively young age. Shepherd recounts how ‘she [Aunt Carmyle, also known as ‘Lang Leeb’] had made James Carmyle an excellent wife; but at fifty-four was quite content to let the excellence follow the wifehood’ (Shepherd, 2017, p. 4). In the context of school education in Scotland, perhaps we should let the much-vaunted *Curriculum for Excellence* go gallivanting ahead in the clear air of some high plateau. We might leave excellence to make its own sweet way in its widow’s weeds.

EDUCATION AS CORRESPONDENCE

Like many others of her generation, Nan Shepherd was someone who took the art of letter writing very seriously indeed. Throughout her long life, Nan corresponded extensively with a wide range of people, including the novelist Jessie Kesson and the poet Charles Murray. Yet it is perhaps the extensive ‘output’ from her ‘flirty and intellectually ardent correspondence’ with the novelist Neil Gunn (1891-1973) (Macfarlane, 2011, p. xi) that provides the most valuable insights into her epistemology. Her letters to Gunn vividly illustrate her way of being in the world and her attitudes to education. They are a testament to her fervent belief that ‘the innocence we have lost’ is ‘living in the one sense at a time to live all the way through’ (Shepherd, 2011, p. 105). This short passage from her best-known work *The Living Mountain* resonates with a distinction made by her contemporary John Macmurray between using our senses ‘as instruments for practical purposes’ and ‘living in them, treating them not as means to practical ends but as ends in themselves’ (Macmurray, 2012, p. 671). It is important to point out that some of Gunn’s responses demonstrate the patriarchal attitudes that blighted the lives and careers of strong, independent women of Nan Shepherd’s generation – and continue to blight the lives of such women today. We shall consider below an example that is related to his reception of her best-known work *The Living Mountain*. In the meantime, we can only surmise that as an ardent letter writer Nan would have been utterly bemused by the exponential growth of what we might call ‘technologies for selfing’, i.e. the websites, blogs, tweets, YouTube videos and press releases that serve to ‘big up’ even the most modest of achievements. These technologies play a key role in constructing contemporary academics as obedient ‘neo-liberal subjects, individual, responsible, striving, competitive, enterprising’ (Ball, 2015, p. 258). They leave little scope for the type of being-in-relation epitomised by the patient and silent art of correspondence. This is a form of address where there are no witnesses (unless, of course, posterity dictates otherwise). Letters are fairly and squarely addressed from one person to another, that is to say, someone with whom one stands in relation, and from whom one generally expects a personal response.

I am not referring here to letters of the ‘to whom it may concern’ or ‘it has come to my attention’ variety. Those seem expressly designed to shake their reader to the core, and to foreclose the possibility of a personal response. In short, correspondence as practised by Nan Shepherd is a form of encounter that illustrates the principle of mutuality that infuses both her work and that of her contemporary John Macmurray. In a public lecture delivered on 5 May 1958 at the then Moray House College of Education (now part of the University of Edinburgh),

Macmurray (2012, p. 670) reminds us that the first principle of human nature is mutuality, and that ‘the first priority in education – if by education we mean learning to be human – *is learning to live in personal relation to other people*’ (my emphasis). Like her friend and close contemporary, Nan Shepherd set great store by ‘valuational’ knowledge, that is to say knowledge that helps us to identify what is worthwhile, and pursue it in whatever manner is appropriate, and knowledge of community. The latter invokes our essentially relational nature (including our relationship with the natural world). As Fielding (2012, p. 680) explains, Macmurray believed that ‘if we are to flourish as human beings we have to be interested in and attentive to what is not ourselves, to the realities of the world around us’. Letter writing requires a very precise form attention to the other and to the world around us.

‘Don’t you loathe having your work over-praised?’ Nan asked Neil Gunn in a letter written in the wake of the positive critical reception of her first two novels. She condemned ‘the too too [sic] flattering ejaculations of the Scots press’. ‘It makes me feel positively nasty towards the praiser’, she told Gunn.⁸ Nowadays, at least in the context of the university, it would be almost unthinkable to admit to loathing praise. At best such unnatural reticence would be greeted with blank incomprehension and suspicion. At worst it would result in an immediate referral to the university’s occupational health service. The most likely outcome is that one would be required to fulfil an additional personal performance indicator relating to ‘bigging up’; or be offered a place on media training course.

A liberal subject who was expected ‘to conform to the role of respectable modest, middle-class woman foisted on her by society’ (Peacock, 2017, p. 82), Nan Shepherd was a lecturer in English at the Training Centre for teachers in Aberdeen, a tertiary college that was later known as the College of Education and is now the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen. In one of her many letters to Neil Gunn she described her role as a teacher of teachers as the ‘heaven-appointed task of trying to prevent a few of the students who pass through our Institution from conforming altogether to the approved pattern’.⁹ In an era in which ‘student satisfaction’ and conformism are regarded as unquestionable goods, it seems unlikely that contemporary teacher educators could give voice to such an aspiration without risking opprobrium. Nan Shepherd, on the other hand, was renowned and celebrated for the passion and enthusiasm she brought to her teaching, as well as for the support and advice she offered to students, colleagues and other aspiring writers. By contemporary standards, the fact that Nan remained in the one institution for her entire career, from her appointment in 1919 until her retirement in 1956, would no doubt mark her out as lacking in drive and ambition. It is not without irony, then, that I begin with a brief outline of her major achievements. I do so in order to persuade any readers who remain to be convinced that she is a worthy focus of our attention. As we shall see, her life etches invaluable lessons on a broad and rocky terrain that has endured for millennia.

⁸ Letter from Nan Shepherd to Neil Gunn, 2 April 1930, Deposit Box 209, Box 19, Folder 7, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Cited in Macfarlane, 2011, p. xiv.

⁹ Letter from Nan Shepherd to Neil Gunn, 2 April 1931, Deposit Box 209, Folder 7, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Cited in Macfarlane, 2011, p. x.

THE CRYSTAL FLAME: A LIFE IN WORDS

Nan Shepherd's reputation as a writer rests mainly on three modernist novels, *The Quarry Wood* (1928), *The Weatherhouse* (1930) and *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933). These novels were published in quick succession during an intensely creative five-year period. In contemporary discourse, 'productive' would be the word used to describe Shepherd's achievements, with its unfortunate overtones of commodities with exchange value. As Conroy and Smith (2017) have pointed out, the ugly neologism 'REF-able' reduces a person's work and professional identity to their capacity to produce 'outputs' within an agreed timeframe. Needless to say, the impulse for Nan Shepherd's 'output' was a passionate engagement with the world around her rather than conformity with societal expectations or institutional diktats. Nan Shepherd would have been perplexed by the term 'output', particularly as her work was generally concerned with going in rather than putting out. 'Input' wouldn't have meant much to her either, of course.

Despite her early success as a novelist, Nan Shepherd did not publish another book for forty-three years. Her response to 'going dumb', – her way of describing what would now be referred to as 'writer's block' – displays a characteristic modesty and acceptance. In a letter to the writer and novelist Neil Gunn, she described how

One reaches (or I do) these dumb places in life. I suppose there's nothing for it but to go on living. Speech may come. Or it may not. And if doesn't I suppose one has just to be content to be dumb. At least not shout for the mere sake of making a noise.¹⁰

Her three modernist novels cemented Nan Shepherd's reputation as a writer and as a leading figure in the movement known as the Scottish Renaissance.¹¹ Shepherd depicted women who were making their own way in the world for a variety of reasons, not the least because of the demographic changes that had taken place in the wake of World War 1. In her introduction to Shepherd's second novel *The Weatherhouse*, the novelist Amy Liptrot observes that 'we are repeatedly taken into the minds of women seeking some kind of self-realisation.'¹² There was nothing solipsistic about this self-realisation: rather, it emerged in and through communion with others and with the natural world. Nan also published a volume of poetry entitled *In the Cairngorms* (1934), which is dedicated to her friends Betty and John Macmurray. The anthology was published in a new edition in 2014, with a foreword by the writer Robert Macfarlane, who has done much to bring Nan Shepherd to prominence in the last few years.

The title of Nan Shepherd's only collection of poetry is the key to one of her most enduring passions, walking *into* the mountain. This preposition signals Nan's unique perspective, which transcends her attitude to mountains and signals the nature of her relationship to the world around her. It also provides some insight into

¹⁰ Letter from Nan Shepherd to Neil Gunn, 2 April 1931, Deposit Box 209, Box 19, Folder 7, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Cited in Macfarlane, 2011, p. xxxvi.

¹¹ This was the name for a mainly literary movement, the Scottish version of modernism, which flourished in the early to mid-twentieth century.

¹² Introduction to *The Weatherhouse* (Shepherd, 2017) by Amy Liptrot, p. ix.

her fundamental disposition, one of modesty, humility and attentiveness, and to her attitude to knowledge. In his gracious introduction to Shepherd's best known work *The Living Mountain* Robert Macfarlane (2011, p. xvi-xvii) points out that Nan 'soon lost interest in 'discovering a pinnacle-point from which she might become the *catascopos*, the looker-down who sees all with a god-like eye'. She herself describes how she soon distanced herself from 'circus walkers' who 'plant flags on all six summits in a matter of fourteen hours' (Shepherd, 2011, p. 4). Nan's preference was not to 'look upwards to spectacular peaks but downwards from the peaks to spectacular chasms' (Shepherd, 2011, p. 2). She preferred to be with the mountain rather than to 'conquer' or 'take' a summit. 'One must go back, and back again, to look at it', she wrote. 'The mind cannot carry away all that it has to give, nor does it always believe possible what it has carried away' (Shepherd, 2011, p. 3).

THE GENEROSITY OF THE VISIBLE AND TANGIBLE WORLD

Throughout her long life Nan Shepherd displayed an openness and receptiveness to the 'quiet generosity of the visible and tangible world' and the mysterious powers that lay in wait for her there (Shepherd, 1987, p. 6). Her thought resonates with that of her friend and contemporary John Macmurray, who considered that 'the training of the emotions [was] primarily a training of the capacity of sensitiveness to the object' (Macmurray, 1935, p. 51). This required an attitude of contemplation that 'centres our emotional capacities upon the object in a search for *its* uniqueness and reality; and so provides an emotional objectivity for the apprehension of *its* value' (Macmurray, 2012, p. 672) (emphasis in the original). In terms that prefigure the distinction made by Macmurray between 'real' and 'unreal' people (Macmurray, 1935) Shepherd describes how Martha, the young protagonist of *The Quarry Wood*, was 'absolutely herself'. There was a 'white flame of sincerity in her'. 'She's like – well, if one could imagine it – a crystal of flame. Perfectly rigid in its own shape, but with all the play and life of flame.' (Shepherd, 1987, p. 49) *The Quarry Wood*, in which Macmurray appears thinly disguised as the Martha's friend and contemporary Luke, was published in 1928, four years before the publication of his first book *Freedom in the Modern World*. Here Macmurray describes the 'wholeness or a completeness' of a 'real person' in the following terms:

There is always a curious simplicity and definiteness about him [a person who is 'real'] – a quietness which is sure of itself ... the quietness of a steady flame ... A very real person seems to have a flame in him, as it were, that shines through and makes him transparent ... He is significant, and significant just be being himself ... because he is vital. (Macmurray, 1932, pp. 156-157)

The Living Mountain, Shepherd's only work of non-fiction is particularly difficult to classify.¹³ Written during the period when Merleau-Ponty was developing his work on the body-subject, which he later set out in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), *The Living Mountain* addresses broadly the same territory. However, its fate could not have been more different. Shepherd's book languished in a drawer for several decades until its eventual publication by Aberdeen

¹³ In his introduction to *The Living Mountain*, Robert MacFarlane (2011, p. xiv) describes the book as 'a celebratory prose poem; a geo-poetic quest; a place-paeon; a philosophical enquiry into the nature of knowledge; and a metaphysical mash-up of Presbyterianism and the Tao.'

University Press in 1977. Merleau-Ponty had attended the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, alongside Sartre, de Beauvoir and Simone Weil, and had passed the prestigious *agrégation* in philosophy in 1930. Shortly after graduating with a degree in English from King's College Aberdeen, Nan had entered teaching, the only profession available to women of her generation. She lacked the resources and the advantageous personal connections available to many men of her generation, let alone professional philosophers, among them her friend and contemporary John Macmurray.

There are striking similarities between the ideas explored in *The Living Mountain* and Merleau-Ponty's work on the importance of perception and embodied knowledge, 'to know, that is, with the knowledge that is a process of living' (Shepherd, 2011, p. 1). Neil Gunn's initial response to *The Living Mountain* was overwhelmingly positive. In a letter written in October 1945¹⁴, he told Nan how much he had enjoyed the book and identified its key characteristics:

This is beautifully done. With restraint, the fine precision of the artist or scientist or scholar; with an exactitude that is never pedantic but always tribute. So love comes through, and wisdom ... you deal with facts. And you build with proposition, methodically and calmly, for light and a state of being are facts in your world (cited in Macfarlane, 2011: xii-xiii).

Yet despite this initially positive response, it appears that Gunn underestimated the true scope of the book, and considered that it would appeal mainly to 'hill and country lovers'. He warned Shepherd that *The Living Mountain* would be hard to publish, and with characteristic modesty she appears to have taken his view at face value. He suggested she add some photographs and maps in order to make the book more accessible to those unfamiliar with the Cairngorms. Perhaps Gunn conflated mountaineering literature with mountain literature. Perhaps Shepherd's book was so novel and difficult to categorise that he simply did not have the conceptual means at his disposal to do it justice.

In the concluding part of this essay we shall consider how Nan's early educational experiences provide valuable insights into to what it means to live good lives together. Her early role models, inspiring teachers whom she encountered at high school and at university, certainly demonstrate the central importance of teaching pupils rather than teaching subjects.

¹⁴ Letter from Neil Gunn to Nan Shepherd, 30 October 1945, Deposit 209, Box 19, Folder 7, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES AND CORRESPONDENCES

Nan received her secondary education at the Aberdeen High School for Girls. There she soon came under the influence of Lucy Ward, a progressive teacher of English who remained at the school until her retirement in 1929. In a piece published in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* on the occasion of her retirement, Ward spoke of the educational project in terms that echo the themes of mutuality, reciprocal care and an orientation towards community that are evident in the philosophy of John Macmurray. These certainly bear repetition in an era in which education is widely regarded as a 'positional good' at the level of the individual, and as a lever for enhanced economic competitiveness at societal level:

Any education which was given or received with a view to individual improvement or success only was stunted. It was for the good of the community that a great school like [the High School for Girls] should exist, sending out year by year women of good education, women with well-balanced minds, large-hearted, interested in their fellow, with broad sympathies, and ready, if need be, to make some sacrifice to serve the community.¹⁵

Ward seemed instinctively to grasp that 'education is not concerned with immediate results but rather with persistent effects' (Macmurray, 2012, p. 670). This is a message that bears repetition in an era characterised by the intensified marketization of learning, in which the role of teachers and academics has largely been reduced to enabling pupils and students to navigate through an ever-increasing array of skills and competences in order to secure personal advantage in a competitive marketplace.

Nan's personalist philosophy continued to evolve at university. After his death in 1960, Nan wrote a short tribute to Herbert Grierson, who was Professor of English Literature at Aberdeen during her time as a student. This is worth exploring in some detail, as it illustrates the distinction between education and erudition addressed by Macmurray in his Moray House lecture of 1958. Despite his evident erudition (he was an acknowledged expert on John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets) Grierson did not fall into the trap of 'teaching [his] subject instead of [his] pupils' (Macmurray, 2012, p. 665). It is clear from Nan's account that, like Macmurray, she saw the relationship between student and teacher as central to the education process. This is encapsulated in her description of Grierson:

He understood intellectual passion. It was the wide-ranging quality of his mind that caught us first: from the beginning he made us share his exhilaration over the sheer abundance of knowledge. Later we came to understand how minute, precise and particularised knowledge had to be, and then saw to our delight that it need not cease to exhilarate.¹⁶

Passion. Exhilaration. Abundance. It is clear from this lexicon that for Nan Shepherd, education was not a technical activity, a means through which to achieve a particular 'learning outcome'. As Macmurray (2012, p. 674) pointed out, education 'is not an engineering job. It is personal and human.' What is particularly

¹⁵ Lucy Ward, quoted in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 24th June, 1929. Cited in Peacock, 2017, p. 67.

¹⁶ Nan Shepherd, *Aberdeen University Review*, 1960.

striking in Nan's account is the manner in which she recalls aspects of Grierson's personhood – the singularity of his mannerisms and his voice.

How fresh our memories of him have remained ... his ways – washing his hands as he spoke, turning gradually away from his audience till he was declaiming to the windows – and his voice, unlike any other voice one had ever heard, swaying and sonorous, chanting *Tears, idle tears, or Timor mortis conturbat me*. None of those who sat under him can hear those strains without his accent. *Abundantly living with the peculiar life of a legend* (my emphasis).

Nan Shepherd's epistemology is encapsulated in the crystal flame of that final sentence: knowledge is something that emerges from the process of living, in and through communion with others.

I have dwelt at some length upon Nan's tribute to her teacher Grierson because it provides 'minute, precise and particularised' insights into her epistemology. Her observations on Grierson's seminal influence on her own writing and poetry indicate a vision of education that transcends the mere transmission of knowledge and enables students *to live with what they know*. It also expresses her explicit commitment to care of the other as a vital element of the educational process:

No Aberdeen student could leave his care without having understood the impact of Donne, though we did not then realise what we were able to see later, that in his work on Donne and the Metaphysics he was putting into the hands of generations to follow the material for a new approach to poetry. The influence of the seventeenth century metaphysicals on the poets of the 1920s was possible partly because Sir Herbert Grierson gave them a new approach to forgotten texts.

Education, then, is about providing successive generations with the conceptual and emotional resources *to make the world anew*, in response to particular conditions that cannot be predicted in advance. Macmurray (1931, p. 3) described this as 'the capacity for change itself', which as Fielding (2012, p. 677) points out is 'a more resonant anticipation of 21st century emphases on 'learning how to learn'. This view of education also goes some way to 'healing the gap between theory and practice which is sanctified by the pious but imaginary notion that knowledge is an end in itself' (Macmurray, 2012, p. 673). The vision of education implicit in Nan's tribute to an influential teacher also casts new light on the conception of a 'good knower' as a person who enjoys mastery of a particular terrain. In the final passage of *The Living Mountain*, Nan observed that

Knowing another is endless. And I have discovered that man's experience of them enlarges rock, flower and bird. The thing to be known grows with the knowing. (Shepherd, 2011, p 108)

This epistemological stance implies an attitude of humility that is in marked contrast to the egocentric attitudes fostered by contemporary educational practices. These lay undue emphasis on the performance of individuals in a competitive environment that pits individuals against each other. The legacy of Nan Shepherd, and indeed of her friend and contemporary John Macmurray, suggests that the educational mission consists in encouraging us to stand side by side, or rather to turn towards each other in the spirit of dialogue.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have attempted to give the reader some insight into the particular abundance of the life of Nan Shepherd, with a view to reinstating the value of wisdom as opposed to the accumulation of knowledge. I realise that this provides the perfect cover for some salient omissions on my part. These include, but are not confined to, tracing in greater detail the parallels between Nan's fictional explorations of the themes that preoccupied her contemporary John Macmurray and the latter's more overtly philosophical work. At the heart of Macmurray's personalist philosophy was the primacy accorded to educating the emotions and the 'capacity for change itself'; placing care and relationships at the heart of community; developing a democratic culture; and, last but not least, acknowledging that, following Shepherd, it is indeed 'a grand thing to get leave to live'. The corollary of this is that it is one of the fundamental purposes of education to enable us to do so wisely and well.

In contemporary parlance, we might say that there is a fair amount of 'unfinished business' when it comes to this exploration of the life and legacy of Nan Shepherd. However, this only emphasises the extent to which the language of business and enterprise has penetrated the language we use to describe and analyse broader human purposes, including education. When it comes to what has been left over, we may look once again to Nan for guidance. The dedication to Betty and John Macmurray (in that order) in Shepherd's volume of poetry *In the Cairngorms* is succeeded by the following text: 'islands are united by the bottom of the sea'. This makes an eloquent case for the place of mystery rather than mastery in the educational process. It also speaks volumes of the relationship between Nan Shepherd and John Macmurray. 'Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?' asked Nan's more illustrious contemporary T.S. Elliot. 'Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?' No doubt Nan, and indeed John Macmurray, would concur with the advice dispensed later in the choruses of Elliot's pageant play with music, 'The Rock':

'I say: take no thought of the harvest
But only of proper sowing'

And

'What life have you, if you have not life together?
There is not life that is not in community.'

How, then, might we honour Nan Shepherd's legacy? How might we bring it to the attention of a global audience without indulging in the 'hustling and hawking' that generally attends missions aiming at 'global reach'? The endowment of a Nan Shepherd Chair of Education might be a good place to start. Perhaps here too we need take no thought of the harvest, but only of the proper sowing.

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